**Patterns of Organization**

The most commonly used patterns of organization are described below.

**Chronological Patterns**

A chronological pattern of organization arranges information according to a progression of time, either forward or backward. When a topic is best understood in terms of different segments of time, a chronological format works well. For example, topics of an historical nature are best organized using this pattern.

**Sequential Patterns**

A sequential pattern of organization is similar to a chronological pattern, but arranges information according to a step-by-step sequence that describes a particular process. Using a sequential pattern, each main section of information represents a main step that one would follow in the actual process. The points included within each main section represent the sub-steps one would follow. When one wishes to describe a process that follows a specific series of steps in a particular order, then, a sequential pattern works well.

**Spatial Patterns**

A spatial pattern of organization arranges information according to how things fit together in physical space; i.e., where one thing exists in relation to another. This pattern works well when a writer wishes to create a mental picture of something which has various parts distinguished by physical location. Topics involving geography, for example, are often best organized using a spatial pattern.

**Compare-Contrast Patterns**

A compare and contrast pattern arranges information according to how two or more things are similar to or different from one another (or both). This is an effective pattern to use when the reader can better understand one subject when it is described in relation to another. If the reader is familiar with one topic, the writer can compare or contrast it with another topic to shed insight on it.

**Cause-Effect Patterns**

This pattern is used to show the different causes and effects of various conditions. This pattern is particularly effective when writing a persuasive document in which the writer advocates some action to solve a problem, because it demonstrates important relationships between variables. There are two major variations to this pattern; (a) dividing the outline into two major sections comprised of causes and effects; or (b) dividing the outline according to the different causes, with the effects of each cause contained within the larger "causes" section. See the examples below.

**Topical Pattern**

This pattern is the most commonly used format, and will typically work when the other patterns do not. A topical pattern arranges information according to different sub-topics within a larger topic, or the "types" of things that fall within a larger category. Using this pattern, each "type" represents a main section of information.